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House Leaders Agree To Cut Sprague Budget

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WASHINGTON—Flooded with members' protests that $6.5 million a year is too much, House leaders have agreed that the budget of the Select Committee on Assassinations' budget must be drastically cut or at least broken into smaller pieces so it appears smaller.

House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., D-Mass., said he expects the House will vote Tuesday to reconstitute the committee to investigate the murders of President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

O'Neill said he will appoint Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Tex., to the vacant chairman post. Gonzalez favors a "gradual and orderly" approach to the investigation with the committee requesting funds "step by step" rather than all at once.

During its three-month life until it expired with the 94th Congress, the select committee's only public activity was to approve a one-year budget of $6.5 million prepared by Chief Counsel Richard A. Sprague.

He told members if they were going to undertake the investigation they should do the job right, if the commit tee's work lasts two years, it would spend at least $13 million—the most expensive investigation ever undertaken by Congress.

Many members returning last week for the opening of the 95th Congress said they could not vote for that much money.

Democratic leaders talked with Gonzalez who had always opposed putting a price tag on the investigation at the start of the probe. He agreed to redo the budget after the committee is given new life this week.

Gonzalez said that when Sprague first presented the $6.5 million budget to the select committee, his initial reaction was "Oh, God."

"Once he went into details I could see there was a case to be made," he said.